

## Forthcoming events

### Annual dinner

Speaker – Lorely Burt MP for Solihull

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> November 7.00pm for 7.30pm  
Renaissance Restaurant, Gloucestershire College  
Cost £25 per person. Menu available from Heather.

### Skittles evening

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> December from 7.30pm  
St James's Hotel, Ambrose Street £6.00 to include light buffet

### Trip to London including a tour of the Houses of Parliament

All the spaces on the coach have been taken for November but we are repeating the trip on Tuesday 15 March 2011  
Please contact Andy at the office if you are interested.

### Monthly curry evenings

Homemade curries @ The Kemble Brewery Inn, Fairview Street  
The first one will be on **Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> January**, 7.30pm. Cost £8.00  
Bookings via Jon Walklett. Email Jon at [walklettjon@gmail.com](mailto:walklettjon@gmail.com)

### Skittles evening

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> February from 7.30pm  
Venue to be confirmed. £6.00 to include light buffet  
For this and most other events contact Heather on 01242 574227  
or email [pandhturner@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:pandhturner@blueyonder.co.uk)

### Quiz night

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> March from 7.30pm  
Swindon Village Hall. £7.50 to include light buffet  
For this and most other events contact Heather on 01242 574227  
or email [pandhturner@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:pandhturner@blueyonder.co.uk)

Free Speech

October 2010

The newsletter of Cheltenham Liberal Democrats

## Also with this newsletter

- Agenda for the **Annual General Meeting** on Thursday 25 November at 6.45 pm at the Municipal Offices
- Nomination forms if you wish to stand as an officer of the association or a conference representative
- A petition from **LEGLAG** in support of a country park in Leckhampton - please get as many signatures as you can!
- Information for members of the Focus Club Draw

## Big win for Chris in Springbank by-election

The Liberal Democrats have stormed to victory in the first election in Cheltenham since the coalition government was formed in May.

In the by-election in Springbank to fill the vacancy left by the sad death of John Morris, Lib Dem candidate Chris Coleman received **722** votes, with the Conservatives trailing far behind in second place with just **188** votes. Labour were third with **142** votes, and the Greens in fourth with **35** votes.



Compared to 2008, the Conservative vote halved and Labour made no progress since the last time they stood in the ward back in 2004.

The election was an important test of local public opinion following the decision of the Liberal Democrats to form a coalition government with the Conservatives at Westminster. Labour delivered three leaflets in the by-election (a lot for them) and claimed that more and more Lib Dem voters were "angry", "sickened", and "cheated" by the actions of the coalition.

This mirrors what Labour MPs in Westminster and their supporters in parts of the media have been claiming nationally.

As we got 66.4% of the vote and Labour got 13%, Labour appears to be rather deluded as to what the public really think about the tough action of the coalition in trying to address the appalling financial situation Labour has left behind.

Congratulations to Chris as he joins Peter Jeffries and Suzanne Williams as part of the excellent team of Councillors for Springbank, and thanks to all those who helped pull off such a brilliant result.

### Springbank result

Chris Coleman	722
Conservatives	188
Labour	142
Green	35

Majority 534

**Result in 2008:** Simon Wheeler 752; Conservative 366. Labour and Green did not stand

# 150,000 new affordable homes

New Lib Dem plans will see the biggest increase in affordable homes for more than thirty years.

The Lib Dems in Government will deliver 150,000 affordable homes over the next four years. That's more than Labour delivered in their first eight years in power!

The plans will reverse the massive

decline in affordable housing under Labour, who sold off more properties than they built.

After 13 years in power, Labour left Britain with 45,000 fewer affordable homes than they started with.

Thanks to the Liberal Democrats, affordable social housing will at long last be available to thousands more families across Britain.



## Membership on the up!

Liberal Democrats are enjoying our most fruitful recruitment and retention period in living memory.

The Liberal Democrat Membership Department is registering a significant increase in people joining the Liberal Democrats. The period since the general election has been one of the most successful for recruitment on record.

Membership has grown by 15.8% since the end of 2009. We have put on an extra 8,000 net members. Media reports of us leaching members to Labour are very wide of the mark.

In May, we gained 3,979 new members – the majority after the election date and after the coalition was formed.

In June we put on a further 1,385 new members. Even during the summer months, when membership tends to be static, we gained an additional 681 new members in July and 558 new members in August.

In total, May 1 to August 31 we gained 6,603 members. For the equivalent four months in 2009 we gained 2,570 new members – a 156% increase.

## Do you want to be a Councillor?

Although the Borough Council elections are only just behind us, we are already thinking about the next set of elections in 2012.

Twenty seats in Cheltenham will be up for grabs and we will be working hard to make gains from both the Conservatives and the PAB group.

Please let us know as soon as possible if you are interested.

Although the job is unpaid, a “backbench” councillor receives an allowance of £5066 pa.

If you think you may like to stand, please call the office on 224889 and we will send you a booklet explaining what the job involves and an application form.



## I can't vote for rise in tuition fees, says Martin

I remain opposed to tuition fees altogether on the grounds that society as a whole benefits from education not just graduates, because plunging young people into debt at the beginning of their careers teaches them a very poor lesson and because the evidence shows that it discourages those from less well-off backgrounds from applying.

It seems to me a complete waste of money to insert a regulator into this system to encourage universities to do what many are trying to do anyway by attracting poorer students but failing because of the way the whole system works.

My view is that we should abolish fees and that the most progressive way to pay for this is from general income tax, although this would not be an easy choice as it would involve putting up income tax and would probably imply significantly fewer students in higher education and far more in skills-based FE courses and apprenticeships.

Personally I believe this rebalancing of post-16 education and training would be no bad thing. It is seen as perfectly respectable in other European countries but in the UK we have become fixated on university status even if some of the degrees offered deliver questionable benefits to the individuals and society.

I am, however, in a small minority in Parliament in taking this position and I am realistic about any prospect of advancing it when we have not reformed post-16 education and training, we are overspending by £170 billion every year and in coalition with a party that, given half a chance, would move towards a completely free market approach to education in which universities could charge what they like. Labour tolerated rising fees and growing student debt and they commissioned



the Browne review so it's pretty clear they too would have lifted the cap further as part of their own cuts package. Even NUS has abandoned its opposition to fees.

Without a rise in general taxation, the shortfall in higher education funding is somewhere around £3billion and if we are to protect student places, the UK science budget and vital FE courses then it has to be found somewhere.

Vince Cable has been arguing furiously within government for a fees-based system that is more progressive than we have now: one that helps less well-off students while they are at university and then asks graduates to repay their loans only when they can afford to do so and in a way that is linked to their ability to pay.

I hope he succeeds and I suspect those who do vote for this option will be voting for the most progressive option possible under current circumstances and a more progressive one than we have at present. I cannot vote for it and hold to my election promise to oppose a rise in tuition fees so I will probably be abstaining. But I don't think we should underestimate how much better this outcome is than it would have been had the Conservatives been left to their own devices.

## Regional Conference

Western Counties Liberal Democrats will be holding a Joint Regional Conference with Devon and Cornwall at the Novotel in Plymouth over the weekend of Nov 20 / 21. All members are welcome to attend. More details will be available shortly.

## Parliamentary boundary review

The forthcoming parliamentary boundaries review will present a major challenge for the region as we seek to protect the electoral positions of our ten sitting MPs, and preserve those constituencies where we are best poised to add to their number.

The likely reduction in the number of seats in the region, from 37 to 35 or 36, will have a knock-on effect on virtually every constituency, including those which might seem to match the new electoral quota as they stand.

Consequently, members of the regional executive will shortly be convening meetings of local party chairs within each of the area groups, listed above, with a view to arriving at a united regional view as to how the new constituencies should best be configured. The regional vice-chair, Gavin Grant, will represent the region on a national co-ordinating body

## ...and there's a council review too.

The County Council is proposing to reduce the number of seats from 63 to 53 before the next elections in 2013. Our group on the county believes we should stick at 63.

Councillors and members of the executive in Cheltenham will be discussing the proposals shortly and making submissions to the Boundary Commission.

## Would you like a tour of Parliament?

Martin is always delighted to welcome constituents to Westminster and arrange a guided tour of the Houses of Parliament for them.

Whether you want to come along with a few friends or family members, or would like to organise a group to come from your school, place of work or organisation, just let Martin know on 224889 or email martin@martinhorwood.net.

Martin says: “It has been a pleasure to see so many constituents up in Westminster - do come along if you can.”

There is no charge for tours but places are limited so please let Martin have as much notice as possible.

